



# R STREET INTEGRATED HARM REDUCTION PRINCIPLES AND PRIORITIES

December 2021

**T**he R Street Institute believes that health policy grounded in harm reduction has the potential to reduce the negative consequences associated with various behaviors drastically, both legal and illegal. Therefore, we embrace and promote all areas of harm reduction, including: cannabis, tobacco, alcohol, drugs and sexual health. We believe that if you support harm reduction for one risky behavior, you should support it for all.

To that end, R Street supports the following principles:

## **Government should not impede people’s ability to protect their health**

Communities that engage in risky behaviors often find ways to help each other stay safer. Government should encourage this by avoiding policies that restrict or prohibit harm reduction services. Making reduced-risk tobacco products more widely available for people who cannot or will not quit smoking cigarettes, expanding access to syringe services programs, and educating on the merits of comprehensive sexuality education are some examples of how the government can avoid impeding people’s ability to protect their health.

## **Harm reduction services should be equitable**

People of all backgrounds engage in risky behaviors, but in many cases, harm reduction is not affordable or accessible to everyone. Thus, promoting equity in the provision of harm reduction services and products addresses cost, geography and structural vulnerability. For example, we support decreasing barriers to medication-assisted treatment for opioid or alcohol use disorders, making sexually transmitted infection testing free, and ensuring harm reduction services are dispersed across geographic location and socioeconomic status.

## **Harm reduction should be apolitical**

Harm reduction often faces a divide between the political parties. The left tends to support [opioid](#) and [sexual health](#) harm reduction and eschews [tobacco harm reduction](#), while the [right](#) does the [opposite](#). We believe all areas of harm reduction should receive equal consideration and policymakers should follow scientific evidence when making health policy decisions. Harms arising from risky behaviors are not limited to political affiliation, nor should the acceptance of harm reduction as a central public health strategy rest along partisan lines.

## **Harm reduction should be non-judgmental**

The primary tenet of harm reduction is that it meets people where they are, and to do this effectively, there is no room for judgment or stigma. To protect this principle, we must ensure access to the information people need to make informed decisions about their health; educate and encourage medical providers to acknowledge that abstinence is not desired by or appropriate for all patients; and promote humane, effective public policy that prioritizes evidence over assumptions.

## **CONTACT US**

For more information on the subject, contact  
Mazen Saleh  
Policy Director, Integrated Harm Reduction  
[msaleh@rstreet.org](mailto:msaleh@rstreet.org)